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INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

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RHMFIS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL//CCJ2/HSE/CCJ5// PRIORITY

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC//J5/RUE// PRIORITY

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 001192

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STATE FOR SCA/CEN (PERRY)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/15/2016

TAGS: PGOV PINR PREL TX

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: A COMPETENT BUREAUCRAT REMAINS

REF: ASHGABAT 1182

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Jennifer L. Brush for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

¶1. (C) Newly appointed hakim (governor) of the oil-rich province Balkan Welayat, Orazmyrat Niyazlyev, impressed Charge with his competence, experience and confidence two weeks into his tenure. Although he has a background in the oil and gas industry, his foci for the future of Balkan is an extension of his perceived successes as hakim of Turkmenabat city in Lebap Welayat, and his crosscutting plans for the welayat weave through the social, economical and political spheres. During a November 9 introductory meeting, Niyazlyev spoke about his plans to bring potable water to Balkan's major cities and improve the underdeveloped agricultural sector. Niyazlyev's appointment contrasts with Niyazov's current trend of promoting young security or law enforcement agents to senior leadership positions, and could bring real development, not just the extraction of petro dollars, to the region. End Summary.

Experienced

¶2. (C) Promoted by Niyazov to the position of Balkan Welayat Hakim during an unscheduled early morning meeting on October 25 (reftel), Niyazlyev did not need to begin his first meeting with the embassy by establishing his bona fide to oversee the important oil industry that dominates his area of responsibility. Niyazlyev spent 17 years working in the Turkmenistan division of the Ministry of Oil and Gas Construction of the Soviet Union before spending almost another decade working in the successor division in independent Turkmenistan. Included in his oil and gas portfolio was a three year posting as Deputy Minister of Oil and Gas Industry and Mineral Resources of Turkmenistan. Acknowledged by Niyazov as a successful mayor of Turkmenabat for five years, Niyazov also described him as a humble man, using the example that Niyazlyev has been seen carrying his own groceries from a local bazaar. (Comment: Humility in this sense connotes a description of an honest person who has not been tempted by corruption, a characteristic the president seems to continue to search for in his recent appointments. End Comment.) Confident and poised, Niyazlyev agreed to a Russian-language meeting, vice Turkmen in translation, and did not once feel obliged to make a gratuitous reference to the Ruhnama or the "Great Leader," as

is the case with less experienced officials.

Primary Agenda Items: Agriculture and Water

¶3. (C) Niyazlyev was comfortable discussing his future plans for the region within the confines of his area of responsibility. When asked about education he argued that quality of schooling years, not quantity, was the hallmark of a good system. He also deferred to the national education plan which included teacher salaries and curriculum decisions and plans to build a new modern "Super School" with presidential money in the provincial capital Balkanabat. He mentioned the national highway improvement plan and the \$20 million that was slated for Balkan Welayat. He specifically noted a Balkanabat city development plan for 2007, which included construction of additional white marble buildings. The fulcrum of Niyazlyev's plans for Balkan Welayat hinged on local social and economic development. Notably, he zealously spoke of bringing potable water to the major Balkan Welayat cities: Turkmenbashy, Gumdag, Hazar and Balkanabat. He also sidestepped the issue of how he got his job -- the firing of the previous hakim for a failed cotton harvest (reftel) -- and concentrated on his plans to develop the agricultural sector. Specifically, he noted that people were willing to move from Lebap Welayat, where he was previously a resident, to Balkan Welayat where they had the opportunity to work on larger land holdings. He said that agriculture in Balkan only arrived with independence, and he wanted to encourage the growth of the non-cotton and non-wheat agricultural sectors in areas of fertile land. He argued that Balkan Welayat residents should grow their produce locally to avoid extra transportation costs associated with bringing in products

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from other welayats.

Avian Influenza, the Internet and Drug Use

4 (C) In a more generalized discussion, Niyazlyev noted the threat of Avian Influenza in the littoral part of Balkan that bordered the Caspian Sea, but also made reference to the national commission that was established to manage the threat and any potential outbreak. He saw no issue with the lack of Internet access in the region and said that citizens only needed to apply to Balkan Telecom to receive an account. On the issue of drug use, Niyazlyev noted that it existed among a few individuals but said it was not a major issue for the region.

Comment

¶5. (C) This introductory meeting with a new welayat hakim was surprisingly refreshing. Prior experience with the international community during his oil and gas days was apparent by his cool demeanor and comfort while talking to a senior level U.S. diplomat. He was open and frank, and knew how to strike a balance between the "party line" where necessary and his own space where appropriate. An intelligent Soviet trained technocrat at the helm could prove beneficial to the people of Balkan during what has been years of revolving door personnel changes. Niyazlyev's objectives are not self-aggrandizing, unlike his boss, and have the real potential to make a positive contribution to the future of the region. It is unlikely he will be dismissed by Niyazov for embezzlement or any other moral or legal crime, more likely his tenure will be curtailed if and when Niyazov begins to see him as a threat and/or too successful. Niyazlyev will have to defend his seat in the upcoming welayat elections in December 2007, where he will have to run for the welayat halk maslahaty (people's council) and then be selected from among its members to serve as governor. Niyazlyev was coy when Charge inquired about his campaign plans. End Comment.

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